



Discover the Keys at the New Eco-Discovery Center

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Have you ever wondered what it would be like to live underwater where you could study the marine life on a Keys' coral reef? You might have a better idea after a visit to the Florida Keys Eco-Discovery Center in Key West where you can step inside NOAA's *Aquarius* exhibit, a model of an actual under-water laboratory located in sanctuary waters 60 feet below the surface on a coral reef. Once inside, you will learn how scientists live and study during a mission in this underwater habitat. The *Aquarius* is only one of the many professionally designed exhibits featured in 6400 square feet of exhibit space.

"We are thrilled to have the Eco-Discovery Center open free of charge to residents and visitors. It was a true partnership working with the other agencies in developing the exhibits and bringing the treasures of the Keys to life for everyone to learn about and enjoy," commented Mary Tagliareni, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Education Coordinator. Tagliareni coordinated the design and development of the interpretive exhibits in partnership with representatives from the National Park Service, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the South Florida Water Management District. "We are also very grateful for the many people who donated their photographs, video sounds and talent to make the exhibits truly reflect the beauty of the Keys," added Tagliareni.

Colorful marine artwork depicting the deep sea, coral reef and mangrove shoreline decorates the outside wall of the Eco-Discovery Center and guides you toward the main entrance. Once inside, you are free to wander through exhibits that describe the ecology of Keys habitats—from the upland pinelands through the hardwood hammock, to the beach dune and then the mangrove shoreline. From



there, you "enter the sea" to learn about the seagrass flats, hard-bottom, coral reef and deep shelf communities. Touch screens with colorful photos and interesting marine life facts help make this section come alive.

The Eco-Discovery Center features a number of fun interactive exhibits. "You Be the Manager" gives you a better understanding of what is involved in making management decisions that affect the future of the Keys ecosystem. At the contour map exhibit you can watch the ocean currents swirl by the Keys or see the locations of lighthouses and historic shipwrecks found in Keys waters. The map, sponsored by the South Florida Water Management District, also points to the connection of the island chain to the South Florida mainland where restoration of the Everglades ecosystem is taking place.

"We expect visitors to come away with a better understanding of the Florida Keys ecosystem and the challenges we face in protecting this environment for future generations," commented Cmdr. Dave Score, superintendent of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. "The Eco-Discovery Center is the result of ten years of hard work by people from the sanctuary staff at the local and national levels, local agency partners, the National



The contour map shows the topography of the entire South Florida ecosystem, including the Everglades to the north on the mainland.



Marine Sanctuary Foundation, and many others,” added Score.

“The Eco-Discovery Center is a world-class multi-media educational facility,” said Kent Edwards, Environmental Administrator for the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary for Florida’s Department of Environmental Protection. “It will virtually transport visitors into the marine and coastal ecosystem.”

The sanctuary encompasses nearly 2,900 square nautical miles of state and federal waters surrounding the Florida Keys and is co-managed by NOAA’s National Marine Sanctuary Program and Florida’s Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas (CAMA) in the Department of Environmental Protection.

The Eco-Discovery Center is part of the Dr. Nancy Foster Environmental Complex, located at the Truman Annex property in Key West. It is open Tuesday through Saturday from 9 am to 4 pm. Proceeds from items purchased in the museum store help support the Eco-Discovery Center.

To Be a Sea Star for the Eco-Discovery Center, please visit: <http://nmsfocean.org/>.

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In recognition of the following organizations whose outstanding generosity demonstrates a commitment to the protection and preservation of America's ocean treasures, including the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and the entire South Florida ecosystem.

Monroe County Tourist Development Council

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

South Florida Water Management District

Royal Caribbean Cruises

National Marine Sanctuary Foundation*



The Eco-Discovery Center takes the visitor through the Keys ecosystem beginning with the most upland habitat, the hardwood hammock.